



24th Legislative District

2001 Report

Representative Lynn Kessler

Senator Jim Hargrove



Budget

Developing a state operating budget for the next two years was one of the toughest challenges of the 2001 legislature. Sharply rising costs for health care, voter-approved increases in education spending, and a slowing economy made it critical to carefully balance our spending with our revenues.

As the session went on, it became clear there were three distinct views of the budget.

Some legislators predicted the economy would get worse and slashed the money needed to reduce class sizes, pay home-care workers a living wage, and maintain local public health services.

Other legislators, mostly in urban areas, pushed for more spending, even if it increased pressure for higher taxes.

As fiscally conservative Democrats representing a rural area, we chose a different path. We supported a budget that makes prudent cuts in non-essential areas, while preserving funding for education, senior services, and critical local services. We left a healthy reserve — over \$600 million in all — as insurance until the economy begins to turn around. Since we are just at the beginning of a two-year budget cycle, if the economy stays soft, we have plenty of time to make additional cuts if needed.

In politics, actions speak louder than words. The difference between the budget that was offered by the opponents and the one that ultimately passed was just \$95 million - **that's less than one half of one percent of the total.** And most of the difference came from cutting the money needed to reduce class size and reducing help to local governments.

The budget we passed works because it takes a middle path. It meets our critical needs for lower class sizes, senior services, and local public health services. It requires no tax increases because it leaves \$600 million in reserve and can be cut later if needed.

Since the end of the session, there have been lower economic forecasts for Washington State, Boeing has announced its intention to lay off thousands of workers, and the stock market has reacted negatively to the terrorism attacks on our country. These developments are going to make our budget decisions even more difficult in the coming year.

Budget Highlights

- ✓ \$22.8 billion operating budget
- ✓ No tax increases
- ✓ Leaves \$600 million in reserves
- ✓ Increases K-12 spending by \$600 million
- ✓ Maintains funding for health and long-term care programs
- ✓ Maintains local public safety and health programs



Transportation

Developing a long-term statewide transportation plan was one of the most difficult issues during the past session, and it will remain a top issue in 2002. As part of the House leadership, Rep. Kessler was very active in the negotiations over transportation issues.

We've all heard in the news that I-5 between Everett and Seattle is the nation's second-most-congested area. Rep. Kessler believes that residents outside Puget Sound need to be concerned because the Seattle area is our state's economic engine, and traffic gridlock there threatens the economy and quality of life statewide. Farmers and manufacturers can't get their goods to the Seattle ports because their trucks are stuck in traffic, Boeing and Microsoft talk of moving jobs to other states so workers can get to work on time, and families endure longer and longer commutes. Clearly, our state's transportation crisis affects all of us, whether we are actually sitting in traffic or not.

Though it is a popular notion that those of us in rural areas are paying to fix Seattle's traffic mess, **the truth is this:** For every dollar paid in transportation taxes, Clallam County gets back \$1.30, Grays Harbor County gets back \$1.40, and Jefferson County gets back \$1.71. For that same dollar paid in, Snohomish County receives 89 cents, King County gets back 88 cents, and Pierce County receives only 67 cents.

Some interest groups are discussing a regional transportation plan that would provide counties only the transportation tax revenue they raise within county borders. **This would hurt rural counties** and fails to recognize that our transportation system is designed to be a statewide network.

Despite the difficulty in reaching an agreement on long-term transportation funding, we did adopt significant legislation that will streamline the permitting process for construction projects, a big step in helping the DOT spend dollars more efficiently. These efficiencies were a key recommendation of the Blue Ribbon Commission on Transportation.



Rural areas rely on statewide transportation money

<u>County</u>	<u>Trans. Tax Paid</u>	<u>Dollars Received</u>
Clallam	\$1	\$1.30
Grays Harbor	\$1	\$1.40
Jefferson	\$1	\$1.71
<i>...for the same dollar</i>		
Snohomish	\$1	\$.89
King	\$1	\$.88
Pierce County	\$1	\$.67

Human Services/Prevention

We continued to fight for human services this session because when we invest in prevention, we receive an enormous pay back as a society — stronger families, better communities, and lower costs (less taxes) for criminal justice and corrections.

One of the toughest issues we faced this year was what to do with sex offenders who have completed their jail time. A federal court judge ruled the state's current program is unconstitutional, raising the specter of sex offenders being turned loose in the community. Ultimately, we approved siting a transitional housing facility for sex offenders at McNeil Island. **More important**, we changed the way we sentence sex offenders so in the future, the criminal justice system will have more control over their release. As a result of this bill, future offenders who are "highly likely to re-offend" will not be released--only those who are "not likely to reoffend" will be considered for parole.

We also approved a package of bills aimed at improving foster care in the state. **The new laws** better define the rights and responsibilities of foster parents, require DSHS to better assess the needs of foster children, authorize additional help for foster children making the transition to independent living, and increase communication among caregivers, caseworkers and the courts.

Finally, during the session Sen. Hargrove introduced a memorial asking Gov. Gary Locke to take steps to reduce the divorce rate among families with children. Solid statistical results from reputable studies show that on average, children from divorced homes will be impacted in many ways. Lower achievement in school, higher drug use and increased rates crime are only a few of the effects. **His goal was** to stimulate a serious discussion of the fact that while divorce is a personal decision, often taken with the best intentions, there is undeniable evidence that families of divorce face more social and economic problems. These problems cost all of us money. It is an issue we can no longer ignore. The response was overwhelming and there will be continued discussion of how we can better support stable families by reducing the divorce rate, and improve outcomes for all children.

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Dear Friends,


Fall 2001


The recent terrorist attacks on our nation have affected all of us. We have been reminded of the things that really matter in our lives — families and friends, faith, and country. Washington is home to major Army, Navy, and Air Force bases, whose troops may soon be called upon to defend America. The struggle against terrorism will not be easy, but we can't win it by succumbing to fear. If we give up the freedoms this country was built on, then the terrorists have won.

One of those basic freedoms is the right to worship in any way we choose. In our grief and anger over the tragic events of September 11, we must not turn against our fellow citizens because of their religious beliefs or practices.

While our nation is coming together to fight terrorism, we will continue to work to meet our state's vital needs while living within our means. Please contact us about any areas of concern to you. Thank you for the privilege of serving you in the Legislature.

Sincerely,


Jim Hargrove
State Senator


Lynn Kessler
State Representative

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